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Spy suspect Harper 'brilliant alcoholic,' U.S. grand jury told

By Alicia C. Shepard
and David Willman
Staff Writers

A friend of spy suspect James Durward Harper Jr. called him a "brilliant alcoholic." A travel agent was angry that he may have helped Harper to take American defense secrets to Polish agents.

And then there was the handwriting expert who recalled a mysterious incident in 1982 when Harper took two handwriting samples to him for evaluation. One of the samples, the expert determined, was written by "an individual who always tries to be very diplomatic, sometimes to the point of being evasive."

While all of that was being said inside a grand jury room in San Francisco Friday, Harper's Orange County attorney was being scolded by a federal prosecutor for talking too much about those Harper has implicated in his alleged espionage activities.

On Friday, a parade of witnesses appeared before 23 federal grand jurors in San Francisco to testify about Harper, the man the FBI claims sold top U.S. secrets about the Minuteman missile and other defense systems to Polish agents, who in turn routed them to the Soviet Union.

"I've known the guy for 15 years," one witness, Jack Stouffer, 56, of Santa Clara, said after appearing before the jury. "I met him in a bar. He's a very clever guy. He's a brilliant alcoholic. But he had to be, to do what he did. He and his wife (Ruby Louise Schuler) both were strange. They both were alcoholics."

Stouffer said he answered about 100 questions before the jury. "They asked me about Jim Harper, his activities and my activities," Stouffer said he once was a manufacturer's representative, but now describes himself as a "play-boy."

House was searched

Stouffer assumes the jury asked him to testify because his name was probably in Harper's phone book. On Monday, six FBI agents with a search warrant knocked on Stouffer's door at his Santa Clara home and spent six hours going through "all my papers because Jim Harper was a friend of mine."

Other witnesses Friday included Harper's brother, Roland, travel agent Fred Sullivan and handwriting expert Charlie Cole.

"I wrote some tickets for the bugger so I was called to testify for the grand jury," Sullivan said. "I gave them the documentation and told what I know, and then expressed some anger that this bugger had used me."

Sullivan wrote a half-dozen airplane tickets — the most expensive for \$1,500 — for Harper to fly to Mexico, Vienna, London and Frankfurt in 1980 and 1981. "But I didn't sell him any tickets beyond the Iron Curtain."

Each time Harper ordered a ticket, he plunked down cash.

A detailed FBI affidavit supporting Harper's arrest last Saturday said the accused man flew to Warsaw, Geneva, Mexico and Vienna as early as 1975 to meet with a Polish agent known as "the Minister."

Sullivan wonders why he was singled out, since the FBI affidavit indicates Harper had flown to Europe more than the half-dozen times Sullivan wrote tickets for him.

Handwriting studied

Cole's connection with Harper began June 28, 1982, when Harper walked into his office and asked Cole to take a close look at the handwriting on a white envelope. The envelope was addressed to Harper in care of Selectron, a Sunnyvale company for which Harper was a consultant during the last year and a half.

In a written analysis for which Harper paid \$75, Cole said, "Overall, it appears that this envelope was written by an individual who has a great desire to hide or conceal their thoughts and actions. At the time of the writing, this individual was emotionally unsure" of himself.

Cole said there was no return address, and the only other marking on the envelope were the words "personal and confidential."

A month later, Harper returned with a small piece of yellow, lined paper that had something scrawled on it. He paid \$50 to know if whoever addressed the envelope was the same person who had written on the piece of paper. It wasn't, Cole told him.

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That was the last Cole heard of Harper, although Harper promised to return with more handwriting samples.

"I couldn't recognize the man if he walked in here now," said Cole, 77, adding that there were about 10 people in the grand jury waiting room Friday morning.

"There were two women in there," he said. "One of them must have been a bookkeeper or an accountant. She had all these books with her."

Another witness, Burt Tunzi, who owns Tunzi Development Co., said he once helped Harper two years ago. But Tunzi wouldn't elaborate. He said Harper was not technically competent and needed advice on semiconductor chips. Others, however, have said Harper was a brilliant engineer, whose only real interest was in technical things.

Tunzi was introduced to Harper through Stouffer about two years ago. "I knew toward the end of the association he wasn't the kind of guy I wanted to deal with," Tunzi said, because Harper missed appointments or showed up for them drunk.

Harper's attorney, William Dougherty, said he got an angry telegram from assistant U.S. Attorney John Gibbons in San Francisco for talking so freely about the case. In an interview at his sprawling, Spanish-style home in Orange County, Dougherty said Friday that Gibbons is furious and jealous of him.

"He's mad because I was on TV and I said this wasn't as big a case as the Boyce case," said Dougherty, who previously represented Christopher Boyce, a spy convicted in one of the biggest espionage cases in U.S. history. The celebrated crime was detailed in a best-selling book entitled, "The Falcon and the Snowman."

Dougherty, an ex-Marine fighter pilot who has worked as a lawyer for the U.S. Attorney's Office, showed a telegram from Gibbons saying that he was "shocked" by comments Dougherty had made to the media. Gibbons said the statements were endangering the FBI's investigation.

"He (Gibbons) says there's an ongoing investigation and he doesn't want to impede it. I'm not trying to impede it. I'm trying to help."

Dougherty said Gibbons followed up the telegram with a phone call Friday. The lawyer said Gibbons was livid because Dougherty had told reporters that his client gave federal authorities the names of at least six more people who helped him in his spying.

Gibbons was not available for comment afterward.

Disputes date given by feds

Dougherty also took issue with the date that federal investigators said they first learned of Harper's identity. He said he's sure investigators knew his client's name in September 1981, even though records indicate they learned the name only last March.

It was Dougherty who first contacted authorities about his client in an attempt to get immunity in exchange for naming other spies. "When I talked to two CIA agents (two years ago), they told me they knew who he was right away."

The grand jury met at least three times last week, but Harper is the only person to have been charged in the case. U.S. Attorney Joseph Russoniello would not say Friday if any one else would be indicted, but he said "Nov. 10 is an outside date by which we will take some action." Harper, who is being held without bail, is scheduled to return to court on Nov. 10.

Staff Writers Mark Nelson and Katherine Ellison contributed to this report